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XXXIX

Islamicate Sexualities

Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire

EDITED BY

Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

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Preface

Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi[1]

DISCIPLINARY DESIRES

This anthology emerges from a seminar sponsored by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in May 2003. We organized the seminar under the title of "Crossing Paths of Middle Eastern and Sexuality Studies: Challenges of Theory, History, and Comparative Methods." The metaphor of travel across two fields reflected our unsatisfied and perhaps unattainable desire to counter the insularity of Middle Eastern Studies by "queering" Islamic historiography. To explore different genealogies of sexuality, we began to question some of the theoretical emphases and epistemic assumptions affecting our knowledge of the history of sexuality. The methods of queering and traveling were not wholly satisfying for reducing this traditional insularity (for reasons explained in the anthology), but we remain confident that the initiatory dialogues across cultural deployments of sexuality inscribed in the following pages are an important contribution to the broadening of gender and sexualities studies.

To make that crossing of paths possible, we invited discussants (Dina Al-Kassim, Brad Epps, Carla Petievich, and Valerie Traub) from outside Middle Eastern studies and within the fields of comparative literary studies and queer theory. We formulated our invitation as a gesture to complicate the Foucauldian model that too often is translated into a binary that juxtaposes a West-

ern *scientia sexualis* (which produced subjects endowed with certain scientifically classifiable sexualities) with its imagined opposite of an Eastern *ars erotica* (an unmitigated desire and practice of pleasure transmitted from master to disciple through secrets).[2] We hoped that the workshop would address the need for materially localized readings of past sexualities represented within Islamicate textual milieus—whether religious, literary, or legal. These papers, we envisaged, would begin to draw the contours of Islamicate discourses on practices of both female and male sexual desires by focusing on kindred histories (from different times and places) of power relations expressed through words and acts. Concerned with the dynamic interplay between cultural constructions of gender and sexuality in Islamicate discourses, we wanted to "travel" adventurously across disciplinary fields, integrating literary criticism with social and cultural history. The dialogue between historians (Kathryn Babayan, Frédéric Lagrange, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Everett K. Rowson) and comparative literary scholars (Sahar Amer and Leyla Rouhi) has now come to inform our diverse interpretations of texts and contexts, words and acts, across a vast geocultural domain—Iberian, Arabic, and Iranian—and an equally challenging temporal field, from the tenth century to the medieval and the modern.[3]

The seminar's success exceeded our expectations. The conversations generated over three invaluable days engaged and challenged the questions we posed in our invitation. We came away with new queries, revised terms, and an intense desire to carry on with our discussions, which we did through soliciting and revising the initial papers for publication. What had been envisaged as comments by our discussants—Dina Al-Kassim, Brad Epps, and Valerie Traub—evolved into contributing papers that frame the volume from its introduction to its body and epilogue. We cannot thank our discussants enough for their intellectual generosity. A productive seminar exchange with Carla Petievich on the representations of female intimacy (Doganas and Zanakhis) in Urdu poetry does not appear in this anthology but will instead form part of her forthcoming book.

TERMS AND METAPHORS

The limitations of the term *Middle East* in the seminar's title soon became evident. Two of our participants focused on Iberia and South Asia, regions historically excluded from the boundaries of the Middle East but including Muslim societies. Beyond its cultural and historical shortcomings, the term *Middle East* was a geopolitical and military designation coined by European cartographers at the turn of the twentieth century when oil explorations and naval access were being strategically arranged and delimited in the Persian Gulf region. For the title of this book, we wanted to move away from such a geopolitical category and its attendant Western ethnocentrism, which carries the additional burden today of the disciplinary politics of area studies. Instead, we chose Marshall G. S. Hodgson's coinage, *Islamicate*. Hodgson's term *Islamicate* was intended to highlight a complex of attitudes and practices that pertain to cultures and societies that live by various versions of the religion Islam.[4] *Islamicate*, with its double adjectival ending, was conceived as parallel to the term *Italianate*, which refers not only to what is historically understood as Italian but all that is associated with Italian styles and modes of cultural expression. Although the designation *Islamicate* carries its own limitations for our project, as it tends to reproduce a tradition of equating the Islamic world with its initial Arabo-Persian center, we use it here because of its conceptual movement away from the nineteenth-century universalizing European idea that distinguished between the world's cultures in part on the basis of religious denomination and that had dominated Islamic studies until Hodgson's proposition.

By the end of the seminar, we were being drawn away from the metaphor of traveling through and across times and geo-

graphic regions and were finding ourselves turning to translation as a metaphor for talking about ideas, concepts, terms, and interpretations and their pertinence to various milieus. Diverging from the historiographic tradition that has marginalized the constructs of gender and sexuality beyond the concerns of history proper, we began to explore culture through the analytical frame of sexuality. The specificity of "queering" Islamicate history and culture, we hoped, would also be productive for rethinking European tropes for masculinity and sexual "unmentionabilities." But the unqualified usage of the terms *pederasty* or *effeminacy,* grounded in the Islamicate world in historically specific ways, revealed the problematic in "translating" sex and relevant cultural, linguistic, and epistemological practices from Islamicate contexts into European and Anglo-American "counterparts." Nevertheless, our translations, which were sometimes ill-fitting, and our discussions of them gave us insights about the limitations and possibilities of our project. We asked: What do the particular processes of normative constructions of sexuality tell us about the Islamicate past and present? How can we recreate a different usable past? How can we reread our texts mindful of "sex" and the multitude of practices and attitudes around desire, and what of the variety of homoerotic acts that defy tidy categorization? What is at stake for gender and sexuality studies in attributing homosexualities to Anglo-Euro-American culture? In light of differing Anglo-Euro-American notions of reality, representation, and knowledge, how do we go about "translating" Islamicate sexualities, based on their own historically determined notions, to English-speaking and -reading audiences?

As translations among disciplinary, geographical, and temporal areas challenged some of the workshop's initial premises, the participants wondered about the suitability of sexuality as a lens to interrogate erotic sociabilities and sexual sensibilities before and beyond the predominant, Foucauldian frame of sexuality. Though Foucault may have correctly claimed that the nineteenth-century transformations in modes of knowledge and

power-based relations made sexuality the "truth" of our identification and subjectivity, have we scholars unwittingly made sexuality the "truth" of our historiographies, well beyond the temporal and geographical confines of Foucault's original proposition? By asking this question, we do not mean to suggest the invalidity of sexuality as a general topic in historical studies. Rather, we would like to reflect momentarily on how privileging and focusing on sexuality in Islamic historiography projects may overshadow other possible paths of inquiry in the efforts to assemble histories.

Our conversations destabilized a range of narratives and rigid categorizations emanating from geographies with their own periodizations of time and that have produced various discourses around the body politic and have formulated sexualities accordingly. The problem of nomenclature—both breaking with classifications based on acts and types and also naming and understanding same-sex desire—permeated our discussion. What does the creation of categories and typologies (homosexual, heterosexual, lesbian, queer, effeminate) do for our readings of texts? Do acts define types? Instead of accumulating a list of types and acts, should we not explore the contours of regulatory technologies of gender and sexualities?

Sexuality studies' recent move away from the term *homosexuality* to the phrase *same-sex practices and desires* has attempted to undo some of the cultural burdens of homosexuality. This analytical shift conforms to the distinction that Foucault made between those societies that discipline and generate sexualities through typologizing human beings into sexual species and other societies that punish and regulate practices without grounding desire onto some inherent self. By adopting the concept of same sex, scholarship on sexuality may have confined us into thinking about a set of human relations bound by the "same-sex-ness" of such relationships. Not only have we made "sex" the truth of these relationships when we attach "same" onto it, but we may have become participants in regenerating

the binary of male and female biogenital difference as the defining mark of that truth. Does it matter, for instance, that two lovers were depicted in medieval Persian or Arabic love poetry with the same androgynous, genderless terms for beauty? Did they even see themselves in a relationship defined by "sex" and "*same* sex"? And how does our same-sex assignation distract us from adequately appreciating the asymmetry in power and the intricacy of cultural and social webs that endow desire with meaning? We must tread carefully, for in the process of reevaluating the appropriateness of same sex in relationships, we would be loath to swing unwittingly toward figures such as the oversexed, lusting woman or the sexless, transcendental mystic man.

Moreover, *same* sex implies *opposite* sex, which is a modernist notion that has emerged over the last two centuries in tandem with other notions about the "complementarity of the sexes." Cultural encounters between Islamicate and European societies, in part shaped by the forces of colonialism, led to the gradual abandonment of traditional Islamicate ontologies that specified one same essence for both man and woman, though the latter had admittedly been an imperfect version of the former. According to this ontological tradition, as Dror Ze'evi has argued for the early modern Ottoman context, one could say that all sexual practices were same-sex practices, some just more perfect than others.[5] To replace *homosexuality* with *same-sex practices and desires* overcomes the nineteenth-century sexual burden of misnaming and mistyping but leaves us with another burdensome term—that of binary gender anachronistically applied to earlier times.

In the spirit of countering dualism, we contested together the tyranny of our many binaries (such as the facile East-West divide or the division made by scholars of sexuality between typologizing societies and those concerned with the prohibition of acts) to recognize that societies that regulate their subjects by typing them homo- and heterosexual have continued to punish acts to varying degrees, and societies that discipline dominantly

through the punishment of acts simultaneously tend to categorize people according to types of desire. As a result of the workshop discussions, we recognize the necessity of contextualizing each example within its textual and historical milieu to locate representations of same-sex desire within historically contingent sociopolitical webs of kinship, property, sovereignty, and friendship.

However, "traveling" and "translating" texts and ideas from traditionally European theories and disciplines enabled us to identify for the general study of gender and sexualities the shared problematics and thematics in the relationships between acts and identities, rhetoric and insults, essentialism and constructionism, religion and mysticism. Certain matrimonial economies (such as polygyny) allowed in Islamicate societies alternative relationships of love between women and destabilize the convention of monogamy that bolsters modern fictions about gender, sexuality, love, marriage, and desire. Expanding the cultural boundaries of studies on sexuality prompted us to reconsider the historical periodizations of premodern and modern and to think of "moments" of state-imposed regulations on our bodies as temporal markers between the premodern and modern.

In our conversations, we have resisted a monolithic rendering of Islamicate sexual practices and discourses throughout the ages. One cannot exaggerate the significance of historicizing when it comes to studying gender and sexuality in Islamicate cultures. Islamic studies and the Islamicate world itself continue to be burdened with a scholarly tradition that has all too often situated Islam beyond temporality and geography, thus producing an effect of atemporal uniformity. Despite our best intentions, we often make statements about matters Islamic across vast spans of time and diverse societies. This affects gender and sexuality studies in particularly sharp ways, since it is a relatively new field of scholarship and one is often tempted to make up for the lack of pertinent historical studies by translating from

other times and places within and without the larger Islamicate world.

This anthology is focused primarily on literary representations and lacks contributions that draw from other archives that include examples of visual culture or juridical and notarial records to integrate social history extensively. We also recognize the limitations of our geographical scope. We are trying not to be comprehensive in our coverage of the Islamicate world but instead to focus on various texts representing a variety of places, times, and disciplines in the hope that the overall project will generate further scholarship for the field of sexualities studies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to conclude this preface with a few words of appreciation—first and foremost, for the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, without whose generous support we could not have held this workshop. We would like to thank particularly Drew Faust, Dean of the Institute; Nancy Cott, Director of the Schlesinger Library and Faculty Director for the Humanities Advanced Seminars; and several of the Institute's staff, whose tireless attention to the organization of this seminar made our work possible: Phyllis Strimling, Chung-Un Seo, and Anna Chesson.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank Rima Hassouneh and Sima Shakhsari for their insightful comments on this preface.
2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 1:53–73.
3. We invited Ottomanist scholars to participate in the seminar and contribute to this volume, and we regret that none were able to.
4. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:57–60.
5. Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East 1500–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

· ONE ·

The Past Is a Foreign Country? The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies

Valerie Traub

"The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." For many students of history, this epigrammatic sentence with which L. P. Hartley begins his 1953 novel *The Go-Between* elicits a powerful sense of recognition. As Catherine Brown remarks in an essay exploring medieval reading practices, "[T]he metaphor slips on comfortably, like a well-worn shoe. The past can feel like a place as much as it does a time—a *foreign* place, outside the doors of the familiar, beyond the gate and the gatekeepers of the *now*."[1] However much we might wish to find in the past a home, an explanation of our present, or a vision of a possible future, Hartley's yoking of time and space through concepts of difference and distance seems to capture the encounter with alterity that many scholars associate with the project of historiography itself.

Yet as Brown notes, the "'common-sense' resonance" of Hartley's recourse to implicit binaries of past/present, foreign/home, they/we, different/similar is worth scrutinizing.[2] Her essay focuses primarily on the way that the practice of reading medieval

of this work (but omitting the references to seasons), see Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), ch. 4.

72. These are actually two different, if related, aspects of sexual segregation—the unavailability of women because of societywide sexual segregation and the all-male environment of the Mamluk barracks.

· SEVEN ·

"In Spirit We Ate Each Other's Sorrow" Female Companionship in Seventeenth-Century Safavi Iran[1]

Kathryn Babayan

This chapter interprets a widow's "inscription" of herself in a journey of loss and separation in late seventeenth-century Isfahan.[2] My reading of the author's poetic narrative has taken liberties in understanding her suffering because human beings share emotions of grief, though temporal and cultural forms of expression may separate them. Such emotional sensibilities have colored my rendition of her decision after her husband's death to travel and perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. I locate her poem as a singular female expression of sorrow and more generally as a source about death and love within certain textual and social milieus. This Isfahani widow's choice to "cure" her melancholy through the writing of a mystical journey toward God reveals how piety and life experiences kindled her desire to circumambulate the Ka'ba.

To imagine this widow's social world, I focus on Isfahan where she lived and on the Ka'ba to which she traveled as devout pilgrim. I analyze the Isfahani widow's narrativized experiences through the symbols and words she used to translate her per-

sonal and social realities and endow them with meaning and power. In situating the ways in which gender and sexuality figure in the writing of the widow's mourning, I encapsulate the social history of elite women in early modern Isfahan and reflect on the relations between social and cultural structures and historical processes. This widow's writing experience illustrates how her subjectivity was formed by dominant discourses on desire and local practices of sworn friendships. In the process of grieving, the widow divulges her love for a female companion *(yar)* from the past. She exposes a feminine space in Isfahani society that was established through a ritual of sisterhood or companionship *(khwahar khwandagi),* which made use of religious connotations and the language of mysticism to express female love and friendship. The freedom awarded by travel, specifically by the experience of pilgrimage, to temporarily rearrange the disciplinary spaces prompts us to reconsider female homosocial spaces in Islamicate societies of the past.

If women did write about their lives in the premodern Islamicate world, these writings have yet to be discovered. Men penned the majority of extant sources, focusing on male circles where women surface in a limited variety of roles as wives, dominant mothers, and beguiling seductresses. Women remain on the margins of recorded premodern Islamic history, and so their experiences are often obscured. But this does not mean that elite women were illiterate, for examples exist of their poetry, calligraphy, and patronage of the literary and visual arts. The Isfahani widow was born into a privileged literary Urdubadi family of penmen, and according to the scribe's introduction to her poem, she was the widow of Mirza Khalil, the *raqamnivis* of the divan, who penned royal decrees for the last Safavi king, Shah Sultan Husayn (1694–1722). It is certainly due to her family's sociopolitical status that the Isfahani widow could perform the Hajj, which was an expensive and dangerous venture in her days. It is also thanks to her elite status that she was educated and that her narrative entered the annals of recorded history. We know that women born into families of religious scholars were learned for

it was common to include chapters on women in *'ulama*'s biographies, the majority of which state that they studied with their fathers.[3] The Urdubadi family scribe introduces our author as the Bilqis and Khadija of the age *(Bilqis al-avani va Khadija al-dawrani).*[4] Praising and comparing the widow with the two wise and powerful female icons of the prophet's wife and the queen of Sheba, the scribe includes her long poem (1,200 verses) in an anthology of letters, decrees, poems, and essays that he probably compiled during his tenure at her family library. These types of anthologies (*jung* and *majmu'a*) are numerous and can certainly serve as archives, yet they remain untapped repositories for the writing of the social and cultural history of Safavi Iran.

Hoping to replenish the void created by her husband's death, the widow sets off on a pilgrimage to Mecca from Isfahan, the capital of the Safavi empire (1590–1722). It is the end of the seventeenth century. At the beginning of her story, she informs the audience of her decision to make the Hajj, and she narrates her pious journey in verse. "Since the wiles of fortune [*charkh-i hilah pardaz*] left my heart burning with sorrow due to the absence [*firaq*] of my intimate companion [*yar*] . . . I vowed to circumambulate the holy Ka'ba," she states, and continues: "I tied myself around the holy Ka'ba," perhaps turning her bodily self into a vow.[5] She tells of her sleepless nights and tormented days: "I saw no solution other than travel [*siyahat*]."[6] The language she employs is mystical, and in fact its poetic form, the *masnavi,* is the privileged medium of Sufi expression and the preferred choice of her favorite medieval poet, Nizami. Travel and circumambulation are the central themes of writing and healing that mark the tone of our widow's poem. The form of this chapter echoes her circular rhythm to communicate the affect of her narrative and to employ it as a tool for leaving and then returning to the widow's melancholy. Each detour hopefully provides for the reader different layers of social and cultural meanings.

The Isfahani widow refers to her husband and God with the same Sufi terms *rafiq* and *yar,* defined as "companion" by the prevalent culture of chivalry that places loyalty and generosity

at its heart, expecting a level of sharing both in matters spiritual and material. Her impulse to travel, or *siyahat,* locates her on the Sufi path toward self-knowledge that ultimately leads to unicity, a stage mapped within the monist quest for union with the divine. The ubiquitous mystical sensation of separation *(firaq)* from the object of desire infuses her narrative with an air of gloom and desperation that, according to tradition, prompted mystics to break from society and wander in pursuit of illumination and truth. For some mystics, death offered the only relief from the melancholic state of separation from their beloved, God. Sidestepping eschatology, they desired to release their selves from worldly captivity. Their yearnings were portrayed in mystical poetry with profane articulations of *'udhri* love ideals in which the unsatisfied lovers were driven inevitably to death.[7] And yet some mystics sought solace in the continuous contemplation of God through the recitation of his speech (the Quran) and his names or before the sacred space of the Ka'ba, his abode.

This widow chooses to fill her absence with the fullness of God at the Ka'ba, to walk through the spaces that the prophet Muhammad and his children had inhabited, and there to unite with the truth. A persistent call that she hears (and describes at moments as a song) draws her toward Mecca, filling her with an excitement that propels her forward along the arduous terrain from Isfahan, northward to the Caucasus, through eastern Anatolia, Syria, and ultimately southward to Arabia. The pilgrim, aware of the difficulties of the journey, is afraid. But as is the case for fellow Sufi devotees on the path of the unknown, her fear must be conquered, and so she, employing the language of chivalry at the start of her mystical journey, "tied her belt and wore her armband." We admire her decision taking: "I washed my heart from the fear of danger. I wrote the divination of my trip as auspicious."[8]

In the process of telling her story, the traveler reveals another, earlier experience of loss that as a respectable married woman in Isfahan she had borne secretly for many years—a forced separation from another *rafiq* and *yar,* a woman. I argue here that the

women's relationship, which was deemed illicit by social, religious authorities, is significant to the widow's decision to perform this holy pilgrimage after her husband's death and to repent of her "sins and crimes" at God's abode. The tensions between profane and sacred love torment this widow, stimulating the journeys toward God and her companion from the past. The tensions at times merge in the language of mysticism but are never fully reconciled.

By the seventeenth century, Persianate poets had versified the experience of the Hajj, though no singular poetic form seems to have been favored to depict the travels. Pilgrimage narratives varied not only in choice of form—*masnavis* (rhymed couplets for didactic, romantic, and Sufi expressions) and *qasidas* (lyric poetry) being used alternatively—but in content as well. It is safe to assume that the Isfahani widow was familiar with these literary practices and exercised the freedom to choose the form and content of the written account of her Hajj. The literature describing the pious act of worship and reverence toward God at the holiest of Muslim shrines relied on a language full of symbols and tropes evoked particularly by poets who understood the Hajj as a mystical journey toward God. The widow's own account of the Hajj demonstrates her knowledge of the modes of representing the pilgrimage's sacred geography and vividly illustrates the common themes of lamentation, absence, separation, and longing for the beloved to recount her personal circumstances and the exercise of piety. Pilgrimage narratives, like the twelfth-century poet Khaqani's *Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn* (Gift of the Two Iraqs), draw on the genre of complaint literature *(shakwiyat)* wherein the state of anguish and sorrow sets the narratives' tone. Communicating his reasons for circumambulating the Ka'ba, Khaqani begins his narrative with a lamentation in which he complains that his contemporaries do not heed the signs of an imminent apocalypse.[9] The causes of grief in complaint literature are unrequited love, the world's transience, destiny's fickleness, and friends' unreliability. All of these themes are present in the Isfahani widow's narrative and situate her pil-

grimage narrative within the genre of complaint literature. Hence, the widow begins her poem with a complaint against the wiles of fortune, which have left her heart burning with sorrow due to the absence *(firaq)* of her intimate companion.

The absence and longing for a friend, the illness stage as part of the curative process of purification and transcendence, and messages from the divine in the guise of a birdsong, musical instrument, or natural phenomenon like the wind are literary motifs suffusing the widow's language. Her spiritual quest will be solitary, for none of her relatives will accompany her travel: "Not one became my friend [*yar*]." But she reminds and comforts herself: "Who needs a human companion? God is the *rafiq* of the forlorn."[10] Hurt by relatives' betrayal *(khwishan u azizan),* she leaves Isfahan like a "violent wind [*sursur*]." Using the trope of Majnun (Madman), who, destitute and deprived of his beloved Layla, wanders the desert, the widow writes, "Alone I rode off to circumambulate the House of the Dispenser of Justice."[11] Audiences familiar with this epic romance would certainly sympathize with Majnun, who was refused for a son-in-law by Layla's father and whose own father then urged him to go on the Hajj to remedy his lovesickness. Pressing him to embrace God, the supreme patriarch with the ultimate authority to decide the fate of human lives, Majnun's father attempts to dissuade his son from earthly love and urges him to recite a prayer at the Ka'ba asking God to cure him of his love for Layla.

In their versions of the Layla and Majnun story, famous medieval poets like Nizami and Jami cast the Ka'ba in the image of a woman and used the female figure to symbolize the dilemma between formal and mystical experiences. The consummation of love is portrayed as a choice between the sacred and the profane—between the *Shari'a* (divine law) and the *Tariqa* (mysticism). The male poets' vacillations between the two Ka'bas were relevant to our widow, for as a fellow mystic she too must confront the tensions between the exoteric and the esoteric. Perhaps our widow journeyed to resolve this dualism, to merge between this and the other worlds. But these tensions and the mentalities behind them clashed against the backset of Isfahani daily life. The tensions between mystical and Shari'a-minded modes of thinking and feeling led to the imperial-level project of regulating the sexuality of Isfahan's subjects. The Isfahani widow is writing at an important time—at a moment in Safavi history when the courtly and religious patriarchy was taking measures to govern domestic spheres by sanctifying, with the force of divine law, heterosexual marriage and attendant social and religious norms. The desire-disciplining discourses must have weighed heavily on our widow's dear friendship and homoerotic desires, provoking ambivalence and shame. Does she feel caught in a predicament that is similar to Majnun's?

Though she relies on conventional rhetoric and dilemmas to explain her situation, the Isfahani widow unconventionally "inscribes" her narrative with a male-dominated poetics. I argue that in her capacity to become a historical subject, she deliberately intervenes in changing and shaping the masculinist language, moving between the discursive possibilities and her own experience and condition. She constantly enters and exits the tradition of *hajjnames* to particularize her experiences and attitudes. Our widow's decision to embark on the pilgrimage, her personal language, and her self-association with Majnun all manifest the contours of her repentance, which she hopes will provide the "cure" for her love toward another woman, which is condemned by Islamic law and Isfahani society. Love *('ishq)* and melancholy *(malikhuliya)* have been classified as twin maladies in Islamicate medical and ethical literature.[12] But what to make of the penitent's evocation of the example of Majnun, who has failed his endeavor to repent from loving Layla? This pilgrim also seems to have been unsuccessful. Only when circumambulating the Ka'ba and encountering God does she feel lightened and cleansed of this forbidden love, for the moment she leaves the Ka'ba, her grief and longing return to haunt her. Unlike in the *Layla and Majnun* story, the Isfahani widow evokes not one but three beloveds—God, her husband, and her female companion. She wishes to relinquish the love she had for her old

companion, but her pilgrimage is also prompted by the death of her husband and by the complex feelings of grief and liberation that she experiences. Is the husband's appearance in the narrative something of a "social requirement" and pretext that preface the account of her female friend? I do not think so: for the Isfahani widow love was an emotion, albeit problematic, that she felt truthfully and genuinely for both companions in her life. But the textures of these loves seem different.

On her way out of Isfahan, she stops first at her husband's grave, her friend's *(yar)* "rose garden." Tears pour from her eyes, "turning into a stream of blood." When she walks away from his tomb, "a wail sounded off my bones like a reed flute" and cried, "Since you are deprived of union with your dear friend, become a nightingale in his rose garden."[13] So she stays the night, like the symbolic nightingale that sings in the secret language of divine love. There, beside her husband, she sleeps peacefully until dawn, when she weeps aloud like the nightingale. Heavy-hearted, she picks herself up and begins the journey of pilgrimage. This is the last time the widow mentions her deceased husband.

The journey to Mecca and Medina was arduous and challenging for pilgrims, requiring them to travel through strange and rough terrain—mountains, highlands, rivers, and finally deserts in territories held by the hosts of the Hajj, the rival Ottomans. After entering the Ottomans' domains, the grieving widow relates feeling out of place and voices nostalgia for Iran and Isfahan. In this narrative of separation and longing, the widow's "self" is represented with mystical themes, symbols and metaphors in both familiar and foreign landscapes. How does the consistent use of Sufi terminology related to absence and longing configure her subjectivity, her religious experiences, her nostalgia for Isfahan, the revisiting of her birthplace, Urdubad, and the discovery of new and strange cities like Aleppo? During her travels in the domains, the Isfahani widow writes about her relationship to different spaces (whether sacred, social, gendered, or sexual) and displays cultural, linguistic, and religious opinions.

Her preferences and aversions resist easy binary categorizations between Sunni and Shi'i, Safavi and Ottoman, local and imperial, elite and popular, hetero- and homosexual, private and public.

Though seemingly a lone traveler until she joins the caravan of Persian pilgrims in Erevan (in Eastern Anatolia), the widow must have been traveling with at least one slave.[14] Her colorful and detailed verse is riveting. Readers easily follow the rhythms of her camel litter as it crosses lush prairies and lofty mountains and rests in villages and cities, and they keep her reflective company on strolls through rose gardens. She communicates with a striking ease with men, from local dignitaries to farmers, who are all gracious hosts along the journey. They protect her from highway robbers and save her boat from capsizing. The men she encounters are both youths and adults, and every one is described with the language that is employed to characterize chivalry. They are gallant man *(javanmard)* who perform their roles with bravery and generosity. Hers is not a gender-specific language for chivalry, for she remarks that she and her female hostesses also live by the same codes of behavior. She emphasizes the "intelligence and discernment" of the good-natured *(niku khuy)* farmer in whose house she spends a night.[15] Her relationship to these gallants is inescapably gendered; they are like her sons *(farzand)*, and she praises the mothers who have nurtured such peerless men. They are kind hosts who follow the culture of etiquette that requires greeting *(pishvaz)* guests even if they are female pilgrims, feasting with them, and escorting *(badraqah)* them to the outskirts of their dwellings. On her way from Qazvin to Sultaniyyeh, she encounters a wise youth *(nawjavan)* in Dawlatabad who invites her into his "Ka'ba of brotherhood [*ikhwan*]" and prepares a feast in her honor. She says the *javanmard*, or gallant youth, treated her with a kindness "I had not seen from relatives except when I was in Isfahan."[16]

The familiarity and kinship that she feels with people on her long journey create a comforting security in the "domains of the Shah of Iran."[17] This security is lost when she leaves behind Iran,

where "we are like valiant lions [*shir-i jiyan*]," and enters the Ottoman lands, "where in fear we turn into mice [*mush*]."[18] Her status as pilgrim and widow as well as her prominent Urdubadi ancestry certainly color her journey through Safavi Iran. Though courted and pleased by the attentions of a few suitors, particularly of the governor of Kharvanaq, a distant relative possessed with the "face of a beautiful child [*tifl*] and the knowledge of Aristotle," she remains nevertheless free to move in and out of both public and private gendered spaces, her honor untarnished.[19] Moreover, she seems to command the respect that allows her to draw the lines between herself and these men in her role as mother, widow, and pilgrim.

En route to Damascus, where she was to join the Ottoman caravans headed for Mecca, she makes a detour. Perhaps in a passionate moment, feeling freed of her husband and liberated through her journey, she decides to travel north to the Caucasus and visit her old friend and distant relative. With the story's unfolding, it becomes clear that their separation had been forced due to rumors in circulation about the two women long ago when they were both still resident in Isfahan. Now she travels to reunite with her other lost love, whom she describes with terms of endearment that are meant for her husband and God *(yar u rafiq)*.

In Tabriz, a previous capital of the Safavis located in northwestern Iran, she is drawn by the proximity of her homeland and longs for her birthplace, Urdubad. There is a consistent sense of the power of space associated either with the holy house of God or that of her birthplace. The sacred and profane sites alike stimulate in her the physical pull, merging in a sanctifying process and providing momentary relief from her melancholic state. She travels by boat across the Aras River to "my Urdubad." Having heard of her arrival, relatives and acquaintances—old and young, men and women—have assembled along the banks of the river *(pishvaz)*: "With kindness and affection my relatives greeted me and took me to the house of

my generous companion [*rafiq*]." Later she will write about the relationship:

> Together in Isfahan, we had been companions *(yar)*.
> In spirit, we ate each other's sorrow [or we were each other's companions in sorrow].
> She was a relative better than any sister,
> kinder than any of my other relatives.
> But suddenly heaven's playful tricks
> appeared on the stage of deceit,
> So much so that it [heaven] hid from my gaze that kind one
> as a body is separated from its soul.
> Forty houses they placed between us
> and inflicted separation between our two bodies.
> For our hearts, no cure save constraint;
> in separation [*hijran*], both of us have waited a century.
> Until at last, the end of the night of torturous separation
> turned into the morning of spiritual union.
> After a century, I saw the face of that friend [*yar*],
> and I threw the baggage into her house.
> The remedy [*da'va*] for the incurable [*bidarman*] pain of separation,
> o dear one, was patience and endurance.[20]

What was the context for this forbidden friendship, and what social life did it have? Why would it have provoked such a reaction as to cause the widow's companion to leave Isfahan and resettle in her ancestral homeland? Let us move momentarily to Isfahan, where the widow and her old friend lived and where their friendship was nurtured but reduced to scandal later.

Although the Muslim culture of veiling and seclusion intended partly to protect male honor, in seventeenth-century Isfahani society husbands did not feel so certain or comfortably secure and in fact felt threatened by their wives' female friends. *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'* (The beliefs of women) was a contemporaneous social critique of "female superstition" by the clergyman Aqa Jamal Khwansari (d. 1710), and it refers to the practice of *siqah-*

yi khwahar khwandagi, which involved a vow of sisterhood that two women exchanged with each other.[21] Aqa Jamal enjoyed enviable access to the courts and persons of the Safavi Shah Sulayman and Sultan Husayn, and he would have certainly been acquainted with the widow's husband, Mirza Khalil, who penned official decrees for the king in the chancellery. Courtly circles were small and thrived on gossip and rumors; it is likely he caught wind of the scandal that led to the separation between Mirza Khalil's wife and her female companion. But this cleric's satire on local female culture suggests that intimate friendships between Isfahani women, which he derides, were sufficiently prevalent to cause general male anxiety. I use this satire to interrogate the practice of friendship in Isfahan. Satire ridicules and mocks with the intention of injuring; without a basis in social practice, satire would lose its rhetorical poignancy and affect. So I use this satire to enter Isfahani society's universe of symbols and attitudes. By juxtaposing these two texts, I hope to shed light on the broader social circle that encompassed elite women and men like Aqa Jamal and Mirza Khalil's widow in the late seventeenth-century period when their society was being gripped by increasing inflexibility.[22]

'Aqa'id al-Nisa' was written around a decade before the accession of the last Safavi shah, Sultan Husayn (1694–1722). His reign ushered a radical shift in mood for Isfahan.[23] By the early seventeenth century, the Shi'i clerical establishment, under the auspices of the Safavi monarchy, had initiated a normative project of regulating sexuality. After the Safavi revolution had succeeded (1501) in shoring support for its ideas throughout the Iranian domains, the Safavi mystic-king Ismail proclaimed that Shi'ism would be the official religion of his imperium, upsetting the political balance in favor of Shari'a-minded clerical governance. Under the guise of a moral campaign that relied on decrees and ethical treatises to assert the law and rule of the Shari'a, Shi'i jurists effected heteronormative subjects through the control of their religious and sexual practices. I do not elaborate here the complex historical conditions that led to this conservative impulse. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, was a pervasive, popular mode of religiosity that competed with Shi'ism, the newly established religion of the Safavi state. Against the backdrop of competing Sufi and Shi'i claims to intimacy with God the king and with the believing denizens of the Safavi realms. Shi'i clerics devoted much attention to inscribing certain forms of sexuality and spirituality as their twin objects of discipline.

By the time Aqa Jamal wrote his satire, a strict, orthodox interpretation of the Shari'a was in force. Shah Sultan Husayn (1694–1722) issued decrees concerning the legal (virtuous) and illegal (virtueless) habits and conducts of life under Safavi rule, and the clergy happily signed their endorsements of the shah's decrees.[24] In a grandiose public show of repentance, the king ordered his men to clear several thousands of wine bottles out of his court cellars and to smash them in Isfahan's central square. Men and women's clothing was regulated to conform to ever stricter notions of Islamic "modesty." Guests at weddings and other social events where both sexes gathered could no longer be entertained with music and dance, and gender segregation was enforced at every private and public event. Sodomy, adultery, prostitution, and gambling were banned. Opium and hashish were declared illegal, and coffeehouses, taverns, and Sufi lodges—all considered dens of Sufi fomentation—were forcibly closed. Under the Safavis' patronage of Shi'i scholars and institutions, mosques, seminaries, and individual clergymen could have their say in politics. Everyone awaited the Mahdi, also known as the Twelfth and Hidden Imam, to instate divine justice on earth and rid the people of the social miseries and injustices they had too long suffered. But the Imam had not yet revealed himself, and in the meantime Shi'i scholars were the authorized intermediaries between the believers and God since they were the specialists in divine law and, Sufi mystics, albeit admittedly charismatic and popular with the crowds, were not.

'Aqa'id al-Nisa' (referred to also as *Kulthum Nane*) was composed at this junction in Safavi history, on the eve of the rationalization of power and fear of independent Sufi expressions of

sexuality and religiosity. Comparable to the cultural disciplinary effects that edicts and religious treatises on ethics and morals intend to provoke, *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'* endeavors to effect similarly through the injurious bite of satire. But luckily the text helps us to piece together images of female denizens in seventeenth-century Isfahan and their friendships within their social arenas prior to the rise of rationalism and patriarchy at court and the theological seminaries. *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'* constitutes an attempt to impress such forms of religiosity on the minds of Isfahan's audiences in public arenas and in the privacy of households.

Whatever Aqa Jamal's intention, it did not curtail the range of responses when he poked fun at five women—Kulthum Nane, Bibi Shah Zaynab, Khaleh Jan Aqa, Baji Yasaman, and Dede Bazmara. These trusty practitioners of local custom represented a broader female urban culture, attested to by the author's wry comment that "besides these five individuals, there are many specialists like them, but their mention would give way to wordiness."[25] Inasmuch as the author of this social satire was a prominent religious authority mocking popular beliefs, he gives details about local customs and attitudes that had synthesized with Islamic norms and practices. In his opinion, ritual obligations were too often neglected. Aqa Jamal describes rituals that, despite countering the spirit and laws of the Shari'a, women continued to perform as part of their daily spirituality. In his preface, he delineates his object of criticism: "any woman of age [*ki sini dashtah bashad*] and inclined to superstition [*khurafat*]."[26] Soon we shall see what he meant by "superstition." *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'* belongs in the genre of essays *(risalah)* by religious scholars *(mujtahid)* who were emulated by seminary students *(talib)*. Members of the community of believers also composed these essays to clarify practice for those believers who questioned how the Shari'a affected daily life.[27] Aqa Jamal's language and style reflect this genre of essays. "This is a summary," he writes, "of the sayings and actions [*aqval va afal*] of women, and what they consider their obligations [*vajibat va mandubat*] and prohibitions [*mahrumat va makruhat*]."[28] The five Isfahani women, "experts" in "superstition," are often mockingly called *'ulama*, religious scholars, by Aqa Jamal.

The author allocates sixteen chapters to the universe of the female gender, from ritual obligations like ablutions, prayer, and fasting to marriage and childbirth.[29] He enters the female homosocial spaces of public baths *(hammam)* and gatherings that were entertained with live instrumental music and the magical spheres of amulets and talismans. Delineating in one chapter what the five women consider "proper" behavior, he describes the fluidity of the boundaries that women observe in their daily activities of, for instance, food and clothes shopping. Women consistently break the rules of seclusion, improperly exposing themselves in *hammams*, neglecting to put on modest demeanors in the presence of men outside their families, and only laxly observing their ritual obligations. Aqa Jamal ends his book with two chapters on female friendships, relationships portrayed to have involved more passionate emotions than matrimony itself has. Here he expresses political antagonism against and fear of a feminine culture tightly knit with love, loyalty, passion, and even sexual desire through vows of sisterhood. The cleric's rejection of these practices as "superstition" carries larger general significance. The women he ridicules may be stock figures, but their beliefs and rituals undoubtedly represent the larger collective culture that impinged on the rationalist religious establishment's project of transforming the mental, emotional, and sexual universe of Isfahan's denizens. The Isfahani widow's self-representation illustrates the conditions of the project and its pressures on society.

With a heavy tone of moralism and sarcasm, Aqa Jamal distorts the practice of sisterhood. According to the female experts on local culture, whose identities the cleric impersonates in the text, every woman should have an avowed sister *(khwahar khwahdah)* for, "what hope does a woman have if she dies without one?"[30] One female expert asserts that friends who spend all

their time together will on the day of reckoning be free of judgment and will go directly to heaven. Women who reject this practice, adds the character of Bibi Shah Zaynab, are sinners *(gonahkar)* who will die as Jews or Christians.[31] Aqa Jamal designates Bibi Shah Zaynab to deride sins *(gonah)* of the kind that the widow would want to repent of in her pilgrimage to the Ka'ba. In these ways, the cleric shows that female practices like the ritual of sisterhood countered sacred law and repentance and ridicule were complementary disciplinary technologies for the production of heterosexual subjects.

In the process of an early and new reading of a corpus of Safavi sources housed in Persian manuscript catalogues in Iran and termed "anthologies" (*jung* and *majmu'a*), I have been intrigued to discover numerous texts on vows of brotherhood, *siqqah-yi ikhwat,* and vows of sisterhood, *siqqah-yi khwahar khwandahgi.* The vows' language situated participants in a shared spiritual communitas that was often represented in chivalry manuals being circulated within craft circles. The friendships entailed partnerships in this world and the hereafter between two brothers or sisters who pledged themselves to one another for the sake of God. In the context of Shi'i law and practice, *siqqah* designates temporary marriages. Here follows a sample text of the vows. On the anniversary of Qadir Khum, the day on which Muhammad purportedly chose Ali as his brother and successor, two "brothers" take each other's hands and the older "brother" *(baradar-i buzurg)* declares: "I seek protection for you in God, I shake hands with you before God, I pledge myself to you for God, and I pledge myself to God, His angels, [His] books, messengers, and sent prophets. And praise be to God, Lord of the Two Worlds." To which the younger brother *(baradar-i kuchak)* replies: "I accept and forfeit all the rights of the brotherhood in favor of proximity to God." The sisterhood vows are similar save for the phrase that the sister adds: "I take you as a sister before God."[32]

Within the body of anthologies that I have just mentioned and consider an archive, legal condemnations of same-sex intercourse abound, and seventeenth-century translations into Persian of medieval Arabic Shi'i texts, like *al-Nihaya* by Shaykh Abu Jafar al-Tusi (d. 1067), affirm the legal prohibitions' relevance to Safavi society.[33] *Al-Nihaya* devotes a chapter to the punishments *(hadd)* for homosexuality—for male *(liwat)* and female *(musahiqa)* homosexual practices. "Like sodomy [*liwat*], which entails a man being sexually intimate [*nazdiki*] with another man, . . . *musahiqa* concerns a woman being sexually intimate [*nazdiki*] with a woman."[34] The legal categories are similar to those traditionally used to weigh cases of same-sex intercourse between men in which age difference, social status (free or slave), religious affiliation (*Muslim* or *kafir*), and the extent of activity or passivity of sex roles determine the degree of the offense.[35] Women like our widow who "have sex" with other women who are their equals in social and religious status are pathologized: they are *majnun* (crazy).

Within the confines of the practice of sisterhood, a certain female intimacy—whether platonic, romantic, or sexual—emerges outside the contours of Islamic law. The rituals and conventions that Aqa Jamal delineates demonstrate the independence of the milieu of sisterhood, which he finds threatening. Aqa Jamal writes that a reputable *(mu'tabar),* trustworthy woman—a kind of intermediary *(pasabz)*—would prepare a wax doll called the *aruschak* (little bride) and place it on a decorated platform, which she would then send to a prospective sister *(khwahar khwandah).* The character of Kulthum Nane explains that the term *aruschak* was originally *arus-i kuchak* (little bride) but was abbreviated with frequent usage.[36] The term has obviously been transported from the context of heterosexual marriages to that of female-female conjoining. Accepting an offer of sisterly marriage entailed returning the *aruschak* crowned with a necklace and rewarding the *pasabz* with an honorary robe *(khilat).* If the offer was refused, a black veil instead was wrapped around the head of the doll before it was sent back. According to Aqa Jamal, the practice could occur between two women unknown to one another. He makes no mention, how-

ever, of their marital status. The Isfahani widow's example shows that female unions occurred not only between acquaintances but also between members from the same extended families who were "sisters" in more ways than one.

According to Aqa Jamal, the bonds were officiated on the anniversary of Qadir Khum as well. Sisters-to-be visited the shrine of one of Prophet Muhammad's descendants through his daughter Fatima and cousin Ali *(imamzadah)* and announced their intended union. At the shrine they declared their vows: "In the name of Ali, the shah conqueror of Khaybar [*bi haqq-i shah-i khaybar gir*], O God, accept and fulfill our desire [*khudaya matlab ma ra bar avar va bipazir*]."[37] Dancing and sherbet drinking were customary celebrations. Ali's central to Shi'ism is common knowledge, but among Sufis and craftsmen he also plays the important role of the model saint and "perfect individual" *(insan-i kamil)*. His figure is ubiquitous in female rituals of the Safavi period, and the female version of the Sufi practice tied disciples together in a companionship founded on loyalty and devotion to Ali. In early modern Safavi Iran, Sufi brotherhoods were a common feature of town life and prominent centers of religious, economic, and political vigor and stability. Voluntary associations, they coordinated and directed much of religious life and public charitable activities in their communities. Their diversity and variety notwithstanding, they shared rituals, like voluntary friendship, that marked people's daily experiences of urban life. In manuals of chivalry, the love guiding the disciple in the order is the love for God, attainable *only* through a friend and experienced through mutual sharing and caring between two brothers. A brother will meet his friend on judgment day, and his friend will be his witness before God, vouching for his entry into paradise. This is a powerful, threatening paradigm for the Shi'i clergy, who were attempting to consolidate their roles as the exclusive intermediaries between God and the community of Muslim believers.

The language of love that the widow uses to describe her female friend places her within the semantic field of mysticism.

Though Persian mystical poetry was a male-centered domain whose object of desire was conventionally configured male and young, there was room for ambiguity between masculine and feminine and between human and divine.[38] It was possible for reading audiences to imagine the beloved as male or female because Persian is a gender-neutral language and the aesthetics of Sufism drew the beloved with beauty markers that did not distinguish one particular gender. To declare the love she feels for every one of her companions (*yar* or *rafiq*)—her deceased husband, her "adopted" sister, and God—our widow appropriates the poetic form of the *masnavi*. Consistent with the genre, she describes her religious experiences and the reawakening of her friendship with Sufi idioms for absence and longing. But in her engagement with the canon, does the widow speak a "female" language that is distinct from the mystical language of men? How does she employ Sufi tropes for divine love and yet feminize her writing within the male discourse on love? Does the rhetoric of "absence," so necessary for writing about the experience of pilgrimage, suffuse the widow's text to the extent that interpretation is clouded and hesitant and separation and mourning are reduced to stock emotions and themes in a woman traveler's narrative of pilgrimage?

Based on a cursory reading of *Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn, Nur al-Mashraqayn,* and *Futuh al-Haramayn*—three pilgrimage narratives composed by the respective male poets Khaqani, Bihishti Haravi, and Lari—I note that our traveler's distinctiveness resides her inclusion of personal episodes and submerged discourses in her poem. As narrator, our widow allows us to inhabit her and to move with the rhythms of her encounters. The language of mysticism is the language for expressing her individuality and singular female experience, but her narration of individual and uncommon experiences in the course of the journey relies only partly on the common themes of longing, grief, and lamentation.

The distinctive conventions of sisterhood, of symbol-laden communication, and of the dress customs of the friendship-

based society of women that were ridiculed and condemned by larger society's cleric guardian sum up in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Iran the identity associated with "lesbianism." In modern (1950s) Persian literary usage, the term describing these friendships—*khwahar khwandah* (adopted sister)—came to also suggest a *tabaq zan* (a lesbian). Mindful of this modernist consciousness, I had initially resisted reading lesbianism between the lines of Aqa Jamal's early modern *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'*. The argument seemed to be based on no more than fearful male fantasies. But now the discovery and juxtaposition of the Isfahani widow's contemporaneous pilgrimage narrative permits the identification of a complicated (at least in the widow's example) same-sex erotic desire between female companions in the Safavi period.

Aqa Jamal relates that even from the confines of their homes these kindred female spirits communicated their most personal and intimate thoughts. He characterizes the women's friendships with double entendres alluding to eating, rubbing, and pounding that in both Arabic and Persian textual renditions of female sexual intercourse were associated with tribadism *(musahiqa)*.[39] Using the semiotics of food the women sent one another messages. A walnut *(juz)* conveyed the message, "I am yours, do not worry"—literally, "do not eat sorrow [*gham makhur*]." A walnut grated one side *(juz-i yiktaraf sayidah)* meant, "I am in pain and weak. I have rubbed this. Do the same!"[40] Saffron signified, "You have made me yellow [melancholic] like pounded saffron. How long shall I eat of your useless sorrow?" An unsalted hazelnut meant, "I have eaten and will continue to eat of your sorrow." A salted hazelnut conveyed the message, "Still I desire you all over." A whole cardamom seed means "I am patient [*hilm*]," but a cracked one means "I am in agony [*halakam*]." A clove means "I am burning [*kababam*]," a cinnamon stick "I adore you [*qurbanat shavam*]," sandalwood "I smell you constantly [*hamah vaqt mibuyamat*]." And in occasions of jealousy perhaps, a particular seed *(anchuchak)* meant "God damn you [*la'nat bar tu*]." The cryptic codes between friends for passion,

intimacy, and lovesickness underscore the significance of natural medicine and medical practices to women's social domains of power and the contestation of them.[41]

Now that we have a more textured appreciation of the practice of friendship between women in early modern Isfahan, let us return to the widow's melancholy and forbidden love. In the encounter, the widow collapses. She "throws [down] her baggage in her friend's house" and shows at least her physical vulnerability. She shifts often from first to second and third persons when addressing her audience and friend, as if boundaries between her self, her beloved, and society blur:

> Happily, I spent some time at my hostess's, that Isfahani companion of mine. O kind friend, o old companion: you did not deny me your sweet soul. I was so nurtured by you, as though fallen from the heavens. But my fortune did not comply. I was exhausted [*khastah*]. The whole time I was suffering [*ranjur*]. I was afflicted with fever [*tab*] and torment [*azar*]. Not for a moment was I able to be her partner in conversation/soul/sex [*ham suhbat*].[42] I did not become physically intimate [*ulfati*] with that good-natured one.

The widow is sick and aloof, unlike her friend, who is openly emotional, expressive, giving. "I was ashamed in front of my friend. You bore pain constantly on my behalf. You grieved over my suffering, you became even more broken-hearted because of my distance [*duri*]."[43]

In the reunion with her former beloved, the widow undergoes a reversal in roles: she relinquishes her narrative persona as lover *('ashiq)*, transforming herself into the object *(mahbub)* of her companion's desire.[44] But on the day of departure, after hearing the nightingale's song, her loyal companion reverts to the status of beloved, sinking into sorrow: "That day, until dinner that dear one had no bread, water, or any other food. You hid the world-illuminating love by drowning your face in the abyss of the deep sea. She cried bloody tears—purple tears poured from her eyelashes like rain onto her skirt. She cried so

much, that loyal relative, a new grief befell me [*matam-i naw shud padidar*]." Withdrawing, our widow falls short of her duties as friend. Instead, her female relatives commiserate and comfort *(yari namudand)* the aggrieved beloved; together "they cried over my departure."[45] Why this cold impassiveness toward her old companion, especially when the widow admits her renewed grief? Was she afraid of divulging the extent of the love she felt for her friend, particularly in her relatives' presence? Maybe she wants to publicly deny the old rumors, declare her renunciation of this illicit love, and traverse the stage before repentance and union with God the true companion. Though women clearly support one another, as the widow's narrative shows, her reconciliation is not whole and satisfactory. Is she ambivalent about leaving her friend, about continuing on the pilgrimage despite her vow? Does grief so rekindle the widow's love for her old companion that it casts doubt on the real object of true love? Or is her grief part of the trope of longing and separation constituent of the pilgrimage experience and of mystical Persianate writing about love?

The widow reveals how much she loves her friend the minute she leaves her, her family, and her native land of Urdubad. Although she has missed Urdubad and voices joy at seeing her family again, her focus is now on her friend. Once she leaves Urdubad, she resumes the role of amorous lover *('ashiq)*. She does not sleep well that night, and the next day she cannot enjoy a stroll in a beautiful garden: "What good is it for me to seek pleasure in a rose garden empty of the ultimate soul? I saw no rose nor plucked one from that garden. I only cried there from loneliness and separation."[46] But the song that from the very beginning has drawn her out of Isfahan pulls her again toward the Ka'ba: "Since you have become saddened after the separation from your companion, go toward the House of Truth. Do not be gloomy due to the parting from your sweetheart. Hurry up, ride your camel, place your load atop the melancholy [*sawda*] of separation from your friend [*yar*]."[47]

She finds immediate relief when she first espies from a distance the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, pays her respects at the tombs of the prophet's daughter and children, and at last circumambulates the Ka'ba. Her ecstasy is almost palpable: "The night of separation between spirits has ended. Eyes have been illuminated in union with the Friend. Everyone has washed their hearts from Satan's whispers, they have expelled the kindness of friends from their chests. Toward the Ka'ba's stone they all face. Sorrow and grief they cast away."[48] The medieval Sufi poet Nizami's verse comes to mind: "How wonderful it is after a wait for the hopeful one to attain a desire [*umid*]."[49] Her "fortune came to such fruition that from the excitement [*shawq*] of union I lost consciousness." She steps through the Gate of Peace *(salam)*—the first entryway to the Ka'ba—sets her eyes on the house of God, and begins to weep, beyond words to describe the holy site. She cannot utter a word to thank God *(khudavand)*, nor does she have the presence of mind to laugh and be happy. She faints, and though regains consciousness after an hour, remains speechless. But once able to "untie the knot that had restricted her tongue," she begins her surrender to God, praising his omnipotence, knowledge, and endless grace. She thanks her creator for the favor *(tawfiq)* he has granted: "You gave me both wealth and life. You brought me to my goal [*maqsad*] and my desire [*matlub*]."[50] Cloaked in black with a golden belt tied around its waist, its face covered with the kisses of pilgrims, the Ka'ba is the beloved.[51] Though she claims its incomparability, she compares it to a youth *(nujavani)* and a lofty flowing cypress tree *(sarv-i ravani)*, using some of Sufi poetry's ungendered metaphors for divine beauty.

I would like to shift focus for a moment to the female engendering of the Ka'ba in the *hajjnames* versified by men to understand how our writer situates her poetic persona within the masculine genre of pilgrimage narratives. Khaqani's *Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn* (Gift of the two Iraqs), written about mid-twelfth century, provides an early example from Persian poetry that links the Ka'ba to womanhood. The Ka'ba's attributes that were favored by male medieval poets like Khaqani and the subsequent

poets Nizami, Sa'di, Hafiz, and Jami were all feminine, and the edifice's architectural features were often compared to a chaste woman's physical ones. Furthermore, the pilgrim's relationship to the Ka'ba is one of love, and the beauty of the Ka'ba is the explicitly human and feminine beloved's. I am relying here on A.L.F.A. Beelaert's excellent study, *A Cure for the Grieving*, of Khaqani's court poetry. Her scholarship discusses the Ka'ba's feminine imagery and concludes that it has yet to see it personified as or compared to a young man or boy in Persian poetry.[52] *Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn* personifies God's sacred abode thus:

> You resemble a bride behind a curtain [*arus-i hijlah*]
> sitting in a quadrangular [*chaharsu*] bridal chamber.
> You are like an houri wrapped in *'abraqi* cloth
> like a king [*shah*] with a mantle [*davaj*] on his shoulders.[53]

The term *arus* referred in early modern Persian usage to both grooms and brides, but it was more commonly used for brides. For Khaqani, the Ka'ba is a hidden bride and heavenly virgin *(huri)*, but alternatively it possesses kingly majesty. The process of the inanimate, sacred object's becoming sexually enlivened deserves further attention and examination. The *huri*, veiled bride, and just king point to the coexistence of gendered attributes in Khaqani's imagery. Another physical, material marker that stands for genderless beauty is the black stone:

> This golden stone, quintessence of the creed,
> is on the face of the Ka'ba a musk-colored mole.[54]

But then Khaqani reconfigures the description of the bride and complicates his and other pilgrims' relationship to the female sex, the Ka'ba, pilgrimage, and formal religion. He problematizes as well pilgrims' mystical relationship to God and his iconic manifestations through the ritual of the Hajj:

> That old and virginal Indian woman
> [who] was given as a bridal present to God's creatures:
> People clasped her against their bosom
> and kissed her, but nobody perforated her.[55]

Khaqani purifies and purges the holy abode of the poet-pilgrim's sexual desires by denying the possibility of penetration. Despite attempts to desexualize the ritual kissing of the Ka'ba, his imagination (re)sexualizes his relationship to the Ka'ba and by extension to women, who interfere with and obstruct his devotion to God. This represents the persistent predicament of men, who are torn between the two Ka'bas of physical and metaphysical love.

Let us return to the Isfahani widow's description of the Ka'ba. She would have been familiar with Khaqani's poetry and repertoire of images. She has already shared her feelings of same-sex desire translated into spiritual friendship *(yar)* with God and her deceased husband. How does the Isfahani widow envision the house of God *(bayt allah, khana-yi yazdan)*? Her term for *beloved* is less gender-specific than Khaqani's. The appellation of *youth (nawjavani)* for the Ka'ba has already referred to the gallant men who have occasionally hosted her along the journey to Mecca.[56] And since the widow does not attribute the culture of chivalry to men exclusively, *nawjavan* can mean "gallant women" as well. She values the chivalric virtues of generosity, courage, and loyalty and praises their display by her friend, mothers, relatives, dervishes, and officials. Male poets have historically treated *nawjavan* as an exclusively masculine noun. The widow's own gender-neutral usage of *nawjavan* for chivalrous youth opens up a semantic possibility. To refer to a young male host, she adds the masculine adjective *mard-i* to *nawjavan* (youth), and the added information brings clarification rather than redundancy.

As a woman composing poetry, she chooses not to call the Ka'ba by the conventional epithet of "bride," perhaps to avoid association with the ritual of sisterhood that involved the exchange of a little-bride wax doll, an *aruschak*. Her description instead borrows Sufi poetry's representation of divine beauty on earth, the chivalrous and beautiful youth, to represent the sacred house's purity and to suggest the mystic pilgrim's relationship to the Hajj and God. Could it be that the Ka'ba's gender does not matter to this widow? The effect of the Ka'ba-sexed male is pro-

duced when she imagines the youth wrapped in a cloth *(daman)* that hugged his loins *(miyan)*. Do the golden belt tied around the edifice and the black stone that protect the Ka'ba ward off also illicit desires, shame, and humiliation from besetting the hearts and souls of female pilgrims? Does the widow renounce her feelings of same-sex desire for the old friend and companion when she too "girds her loins" and set off on the long, arduous journey to the holy lands?

> Standing before the Ka'ba, she cannot tell if she is dreaming or awake: Carrying the weight of a hundred tons of crimes and sins, I turned my face toward the circumambulating God's [*yazdan*] Alley. After seven circles, my shoulder became lightened from the weight of my sins [*gunah*]. As I began to enumerate my transgressions [*chu dadam bar qalam-i isyan khud ra*], I emptied my leather bag all the way to the bottom. With water from my eyes, I cleansed my crimes [*jurm*]. My sins were numerous, and the path very short. On the seventh turn of my guilt, I repaired my ruined heart. I sought the road of forgiveness and washed away my filthy crime. I drank a sip of Zamzam's water. Sorrow, pain, and affliction were all forgotten. The water's purity enlivened my body and cured my diseased [*bimar*] heart. At the house of God, I apologized for my crime. Like a beggar, I began to cry. What shall I say? In negligence, my life was wasted. In your abode, no honor remains for me. Woe upon me if you do not forgive my crime. Hell shall be my dwelling place. Since performing the "pilgrimage of women," I have kicked Satan's face. My heart has been cleansed of his whispers. I shall not allow my heart to engage in bad deeds [*afal-i bad*].[57]

Was her heart "diseased" with the malady of desiring another woman, and was loving her one of the satanic crimes she repents of? We cannot be certain, but we do know she demonstrates repentance by having her hair cut and arranging for a camel's sacrifice.

The following provides the social and religious background for the widow's *hajjname* and Aqa Jamal's *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'*. In Safavi times, Shi'i clerical responses to the perceived dangers

that emanated from Sufi circles included polemically labeling the Sufi and sodomite as figures of heretical "excess." Shi'i discourse condemned the practices of celibacy and sodomy in favor of heterosexual marriage modeled after the prophet Muhammad's own conjugal unions. Boy gazing was one of the stages that Sufi devotees had to traverse in their mystic journey toward union with God. Characterized often in textual sources as an older man, the one performing the mystical ritual of gazing would look at a beautiful male youth who represented the divine on earth. The ritual of boy gazing, which provoked simultaneous sensations of separation from and longing for the object of desire, was intended to test as well as aid the mystic's self-disciplining of carnal desires. Since he actually sought and loved God and not the youth, the mystic was forbidden from acting on his physical desire. Gazing and celibacy in this context complemented one another, for the gazer had to remain in a state of celibacy before he could truly be an ideal lover on the mystic path. Within Sufi contexts, celibacy and boy gazing signified the sacred, but Shi'i polemics came to cast the two practices as contradicting Muhammad's teachings and hence God's will. Sexual activity within matrimony—not abstinence and celibacy—became sacred. Drawing from the Muslim sacred texts of the Quran and Hadith, Shi'i clerics offered up the sanctity of marriage as the worldly path to God, bolstering state-level Safavi efforts to centralize and govern.

Anxieties about sexual behavior in Sufi circles revealed as well the Shi'i clergy's fears that intimacy between spiritual brothers and friends could easily lead to political solidarities strong enough to resist clerical—perhaps even imperial—authority. In 1550, the Safavi king Shah Tahmasb issued the first in a series of decrees about "proper" and "improper" Muslim behavior that prohibited wine, sodomy, and beard shaving.[58] Besides calling for set prices and secure roads throughout the empire and for the welfare and education of orphans, the first decree laid down a set of ethics detailing appropriate gender roles and displays of sexuality in public spaces. The decree went on to caution Safavi

subjects against celibacy, long associated with Sufi ways of life, and exhorted the male populace to be both sexually and socially productive. Vacationing, relaxing, and comfort-seeking were disfavored pastimes since they reduced men to a state of inactivity, making them no better off than women and the dead. Beardless youth *(amrad)*, the objects of male desire in Sufism's conceptualization of spirituality, and women were not allowed to congregate at public events *(marika)* that included storytelling and acrobatics put on by chivalric clubs.

According to the decrees, which were engraved on mosque walls, a beardless youth would be punished by the law if he prostituted himself in a *hammam* (a public bath). The scrupulous proscriptions on social and sexual behaviors also applied to beards, the visible emblems of manhood. When it was practiced within the specific conditions of an older man's penetration of a youth discreetly and behind closed doors, sex between men had been tolerated in Safavi society. But the first sign of a beard—stubble—heralded manhood, at which stage sodomy became taboo. And if a man persistently shaved his beard, "delaying" his entry into manhood with its responsibilities of work, marriage, and children, he was a serious threat to social order in the Safavi imperium. The set of moral significations to beards and their removal deserved discussion in the anti-Sufi discourses penned by Shi'i clerics during the seventeenth century. Devoting fourteen chapters to various aspects of daily life, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi's (d. 1699) normative manual on Shi'i mores and ethics delineated the proprieties of dress, makeup, sleep, marriage, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and so on.[59] Though Majlisi Jr. stated that it was well known that clerics had forbidden beard shaving, he nevertheless included a section on the different ways to shave facial hair. But his view that a beard signified sexual virility and even patriarchy was unequivocal throughout the manual. He cited the following originary event, supposedly related by Prophet Muhammad himself. On the day God accepted Adam's repentance for having tasted the apple of knowledge, Adam declared, "O God, make me more beautiful." So God gave him a thick black beard. But having never seen a beard before, Adam asked God, "What is this?" "This is your ornament," replied God, "and that of your sons till eternity."

In his chapter on the virtues of marriage and the vices of celibacy, Majlisi Jr. reiterated the norm of heterosexuality based on the authoritative report that the prophet Muhammad, who was the exemplar for all of humankind, loved women. He proceeded to list examples that confirmed the Imams' heterosexuality and the religious obligation at the core of piety—taking a wife. Like other contemporaneous literature, the manual of mores represented the prophet as having demarcated Muslim men's faith and religious beliefs on specific grounds of sexuality: a true Muslim could not have sexual intercourse with members of his sex, bearded or not. When some women allegedly complained to Muhammad that their husbands avoided sexual relations with them, the prophet condemned the men thus: "They are not of my followers." It is necessary to pause and reflect on the reasons that heterosexual conjugality received such voluble advocacy from Shi'i clerics. Too many Sufi mystics were eschewing the more ordinary unions of marriage to female mortals in favor of the more rarefied, transformative unions with God. And these unions that they pursued so ardently were undermining the project of making socially and sexually disciplined and productive Safavi subjects.

Majlisi Jr.'s normative manual narrates that Imam Jafar once chided a devotee who rejected the material world and turned ascetic and celibate that wife taking constituted one half of a believer's religious duties. Sufi spirituality's fundamental tenet that union between the human and the divine can be attained through a man's mystical love for his male beloved effectually collapsed the distance between the believer and God that the rationalist clerics were attempting to create. Based on a preliminary reading of the religious treatises on Shi'i ethics, I have observed that legitimate sexual acts in marriage are differentiated from the illegitimate, extramarital acts of adultery and sodomy that transgress the Shari'a and social norms. Same-sex desire be-

tween women receives the silent treatment in the religious treatises on ethics; in fact its only treatment is Aqa Jamal's satire, *Beliefs of Women*. Once celibacy, gazing, and same-sex friendships within Sufism had signified the sacred, but the clergy, intent on redrawing the boundary between the sacred and the sexual, preached that these practices contradicted Muhammad's teachings and hence God's will. Sexual activity was limited to matrimony.[60] It is likely that these sexual politics provoked the rumors in Isfahan about our widow's relationship with her companion and forced them into the long and silent separation.

Aqa Jamal writes of the trouble that wives have suffered because their husbands were uninterested in sexual intercourse with them. His satire describes the female rituals of shrine visitation and fasting associated with Ali. One of the fasts of Ali *(ruzah-yi mortaza Ali)*, for example, was particularly recommended for girls who wanted good and dutiful husbands. The local expert Kulthum Nane recommends that eligible women visit the famous minaret of *Kawn Birinji* (Brassy base) and recite the following verse:

> O Minaret of Kawn Birinji,
> I shall utter something, but do not be offended.
> My loins want a handle in them [*miyun-i man dastah mikhwad*].
> They want a man of commitment [*mard-i kamar bastah*]!

I have previously seen visitations to this minaret as instances of a fertility ritual, but Afsaneh Najmabadi has offered a second layer of interpretation that within the context of the politics of matrimony, sodomy, and celibacy is compelling. The women carry out the rituals and recite the verse because they fear that what impedes pregnancy and procreation is not male infertility per say but seed-spilling as a result of sexual acts with other men. A "man of commitment" in this context could be a virgin not sodomized *(amrad)* during youth by an older man. As Najmabadi suggests, *kamar bastan* (knot tying) was perhaps intended to discourage adolescents from developing a sexual preference for other men. Aqa Jamal hints at the similar threat posed by women who avoided their husbands, preferring the company of "sisters." When a man sent one sister a golden jug *(tung-i tala'i)*, he was demanding:

> You who drink wine from the golden jug, why do you not drink from the tip of my penis [*sar-i surna*]?[61]

Aqa Jamal's male anxiety focuses not only on sisterhood but on other feminine spheres, including public baths, where he imagines that women engage with one another in sexual intimacies. The five experts urge them to sit in a circle, reveal their genitals *(kashf-i awrat)*, depilate each other, and "mix" (the term *ikhtilat*, like *suhbat*, is a double entendre meaning to converse as well as "have sex").[62] In his discussion of female participation in wedding rituals, Aqa Jamal expresses his fear about marriage. In his opinion, only fortunate women should prepare the bride's and groom's bed on the wedding night, and he specifies three kinds of women whose participation should be rebuffed: those who share their husbands with rival wives *(havu)*, those who have remarried, and those who are not husband-lovers *(shawhar dust)*, whom we may categorize "lesbianlike."[63] The fate of the newlywed couple should be protected right away from contamination by objectionable social practices like polygamy and female homoeroticism.

These kinds of technologies that regulated subjects' gender and sexuality would have discredited our widow's relationship with her companion and led to the latter's banishment to the distant northern region of Urdubad. Confronted by the overriding moralism that views same-sex unions with horror, "girding her loins" at the outset of the pilgrimage to the holy lands, does our widow vow to repent of her youthful love? Has she rejected her vows of sisterhood and the obligations and protocols of friendship? Her illicit feelings of same-sex desire for another woman must be part of the one hundred tons of crimes and sins that weigh on her during circumambulation,[64] but maybe her inaction, the result of restraint and abstinence in the face of rekin-

dled erotic desire, makes possible her active pursuit of union with God at his holy abode.

Her pilgrimage completed and her "diseased" heart cured, the traveler turns around and heads back toward Isfahan. But in Aleppo, the pain of melancholy reinhabits her, and she realizes that only in God's holy places of Mecca and Medina did she feel at peace. Woefully she cries, "How pleasant was the Ka'ba! How worthy was the going, and how empty is the return."[65] And she does the only thing she can—continue the journey.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Dina Al-Kassim, Rima Hassouneh, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Helmut Puff, and Valerie Traub for their invaluable suggestions and critical reading of earlier drafts of this chapter.
2. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* ed. Rasul Jafarian (Qumm, 1995).
3. For example, see the late seventeenth-century biography of religious scholars *('ulama)* in Safavi Isfahan, Afandi, *Riyaz al-'Ulama wa Hiyaz al-Fuzala,* ed. A. al-Husayni, 6 vols. (Qumm, 1980).
4. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* 9.
5. Ibid., 23. I would like to thank Afsaneh Najmabadi for suggesting this reading based on the practice of women tying a piece of cloth around shrines to symbolize their vow-taking.
6. Ibid.
7. I would like to thank Franklin Lewis for his generous response to the query about lovesickness and melancholy in Islamicate literature that I posted on *Adabiyat H-NET* (August 6, 2003).
8. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* 23.
9. See A.L.F.A. Beelaert's study, *A Cure for Grieving* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), of Khaqani's *Tuhfat al-'Iraqayn.* My understanding of Khaqani relies on Beelaert's sensitive reading of the twelfth-century Persian poet.
10. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* 23.
11. Ibid.
12. See, for example, Hans Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Dimitri Gutas, "The Malady of Love," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 1 (1984): 21–55; and Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Nizami's Epic Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
13. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* 24–25.
14. On the pilgrimage to Mecca during the early modern period and the possibilities of different routes, see Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj under the Ottomans 1517–1683* (London: Tauris, 1994); M. N. Pearson, *Pilgrimage to Mecca: The Indian Experience 1500–1800* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1996); Sanjay Subramanyam, "Persians, Pilgrims, and Portuguese: The Travails of Masulipatnam Shipping in the Western Indian Ocean, 1590–1655," *Modern Asian Studies* 22 (1988): 503–30; and R. D. McChesney, "The Central Asian Hajj-Pilgrimage in the Time of the Early Modern Empires," in *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors,* ed. Michel Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 129–156.
15. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* 39.
16. Ibid., 31–32.
17. She calls the Safavi dominion the *vilayat-i 'ajam* and the *sarzamin-i shah-i Iran, Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* 47.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 39.
20. Ibid., 41.
21. Aqa Jamal Khwansari, *'Aqa'id al-Nisa',* ed. Mahmud Katira'i (Tehran, 1970). For a discussion of this text, see my chapter "The *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'*: A Glimpse at Safavid Women in Local Isfahani Culture," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World,* ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 349–81.
22. See my article on *'Aqa'id al-Nisa',* where I place this satire within the larger context of gender and politics at the Safavi court in Isfahan.
23. According to the editor Mahmud Katira'i, *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'* was written during the reign of Shah Sulayman (1666–1694).
24. Abu Talib Mir Findiriski, *Tuhfat al-'Alam,* Tehran University (manuscript 4955), f206a.
25. Khwansari, *'Aqa'id al-Nisa',* 1.
26. Ibid.
27. This point is made by the editor, M. Katira'i. Ibid., 7–8.
28. Ibid.
29. The sixteen chapter subjects in *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'* are ritual ablutions,

ritual prayer, fasting, marriage, wedding nights, childbirth, bathhouses, musical instruments and their occasions, marital relations, the foods used in vows *(nazr)*, amulets and talismans, men who are accessible *(mahram)* and inaccessible *(namahram)* to women, conditions that make auspicious women's prayers, house guests, vows of sisterhood, and the items sisters would exchange.

30. Khwansari, *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'*, 35.
31. Ibid.
32. Malek Library (manuscript Majmu'a 5085) dated seventeenth or eighteenth century CE and compiled by the poet Abd al-Azim b. Mirza Ali Khoi, known as Shuridah.
33. Shaykh Tusi's *al-Nihaya fi Mujarrad al-Fiqh wa'l Fatawa* was translated into Persian in the late seventeenth century. A copy, recorded and dated fifth of Zul Qadah 1052/1643, is at the Malik Library (manuscript Majmu'a 3624).
34. Ibid., f284b.
35. See Everett K. Rowson's essay on the legal condemnation and literary celebration of male homoeroticism, in which he delineates the symmetries and asymmetries of such sexual conduct in Sunni legal discourse: "Homosexuality in the Medieval Islamic World: Literary Celebration vs. Legal Condemnation," *Princeton Mellon Seminar,* May 1995.
36. Khwansari, *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'*, 37.
37. Ibid., 36.
38. Carla Petievich makes this point about Urdu poetry in her chapter "The Invention and Subsequent Erasure of Urdu Poetry's 'Lesbian' Voice," in *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society,* ed. Ruth Vanita (New York: Routledge, 2002).
39. The verb *khwardan* enjoys a wide semantic field of meanings signifying to *eat, drink, gnaw, corrode, receive, suffer, appropriate, hit* or *strike,* and *touch*. The word's etymological roots are Pahlavi (Middle Persian) and mean *eating* and *consuming*. *Khwardan* comes to be used as a compound verb in Persian, as in the case of *'gham khwardan'* (to grieve or feel grief and be sorrowful, literally, "to eat sorrow"). I have deliberately chosen to emphasize this literal translation because I think the authors here, Aqa Jamal and the Isfahani widow, play on the erotic layer of *khwardan*.
40. The entry in the contemporary Persian dictionary *Burhan-i Qati'* defines *juzaak* thus: "to worry and become anxious" *(anduhnak)*. The etymology reveals the relationship between food and humors.
41. All the food elements (jujube, saffron, sandal, cloves) enumerated here have therapeutic value in the realm of natural medicine. See, for example, the late seventeenth-century Safavi medical text, *Tuhfat al-Mu'minin,* by Muhammad Mu'min al-Husayni al-Tunakabuni, Bibliotheque Nationale (manuscript: Persan Supp. 1287).
42. On the double meaning of *suhbat,* see Khwansari, *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'* for the contemporaneous use of *suhbat* to mean "intercourse" in heterosexual matrimonial contexts.
43. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* 42.
44. I would like to thank Carla Petievich for suggesting this reading of mystical transcendence through role reversal between Isfahani widow and companion in Urdubad. Carla Petievich, Response to "In Spirit We Ate Each Other's Sorrow," Crossing Paths of Middle Eastern and Sexuality Studies: Challenges of Theory, History, and Comparative Methods, conference at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, May 2003.
45. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj,* 42.
46. Ibid., 43.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 74.
49. Ibid., 75.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Beelaert assumes this may be a vestige of the feminine genderization of the word *Ka'ba* in Arabic. In the less common cases of the Ka'ba's masculinity, it is not a beloved but a king or sultan (as in one of Nizami's *qasidas*); this portrayal appears in courtly rather than mystical milieus. The Ka'ba as queen does appear in Khaqani's pilgrimage *qasidas,* but the image of the chaste bride-Ka'ba dominates the tradition of feminizing the edifice.
53. Beelaert, *A Cure for Grieving,* 143.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid, 143–44.
56. I would like to thank Franklin Lewis for his observation that *nawjavan* could be "an androgynous being, like the *ghulam* in the Quranic paradise, assuming a physical form according to the plea-

sures of the onlooker[.] . . . *nawjavan* may be a claque on the Quranic *ghulam*, or at least have as its possible archetype the young Joseph representing physical beauty, object of jealousy to his brothers, possible illicit object of desire for the male who purchases him, definite illicit object of desire for the wife of 'Aziz and her female companions, and idealized object of lost love for Jacob, his father" (e-mail exchange on August 6, 2003). However, the widow's modification of *nawjavan* to signify a male youth represents the prevailing attitude that masculinized *nawjavan*.

57. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj*, 78.
58. "Ain-i Shah Tahmasb," ed. M. T. Danishpazhu, *Barisiha-yi Tarikhi* 7 (1972): 121–42.
59. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, *Hilyat al-Muttaqin* (Qumm, 1992).
60. Here I have been inspired by Helmut Puff's insightful study *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), where he eloquently draws out the similar affinities between celibacy, matrimony, and sodomy in Reformation discourse.
61. Khwansari, *'Aqa'id al-Nisa'*, 41. The editor writes in note 66 that *sar-i surna* is a metaphor for the penis.
62. Ibid., 54. The editor notes during the Qajar period a certain cleric issued a *fatwa* in Birjand (Aqa Shaykh Husayni) that all women in the hammams wear cloths *(lung)* to cover their vaginas.
63. Ibid., 13.
64. I have come across other contemporaneous representations of sisters haunted by homoerotic desires. For example, the single-page miniature (1645–1650) by Muhammad Qasim depicts a distressed woman, a cup, a water pipe, and a wine jug with a female face painted on it. The poetry framing the miniature, though a later addition, comments on the taboo desire: "The memory of your neck remains with me. A hundred odes in praise of you. . . . Weave another world out of your temperament [*tab'a*]. This [weaving] too is beyond others." See Massumeh Farhad, *Safavid Single Page Paintings, 1629–1666*, PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1987, 306. I hope to incorporate these examples in my work-in-progress to broaden the evidence for female homoerotic practices in early modern Iran.
65. *Safarnama-yi Manzum-i Hajj*, 82.

· EIGHT ·

Types, Acts, or What? Regulation of Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Iran[1]

Afsaneh Najmabadi

A slave girl was shown to the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861). He asked her, "Are you a virgin or what?" She replied, "Or what, O Emir of the Believers." He laughed and bought her.[2]

Often narrated as an example of a slave girl's wit, I have long been intrigued by the possibilities of "or what." By its textual location, it is at first reading a simple negation of the more definite category, "a virgin." Yet it refuses a definite description. The wit lies in the girl's saying yet refusing to say, "I am not a virgin"—in refusing to identify with a "lack" or a "not" by projecting herself onto an indeterminate designation, a "what." I have found this refusal of the hailing categories useful for studying genders and sexualities in Qajar Iran (1785–1925), where genders do not respond to "Are you a man, or are you a woman?" and sexual subjectivities cannot be named homosexual or heterosexual. How do we study these genders and sexualities within a field dominated by categorizations of types and acts?

Grounded as I was in the modern imperative to think "man" and "woman," it was indeed an analytical challenge when I